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AUTHOR	Groff, Irvin
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ABSTRACT

Developed for a high school quinmester unit on the language of persuasion, this guide provides the teacher with teaching strategies for a study of the speaker or writer as a persuader, the identification of the logical and psychological tools of persuasion, an examination of the levels of abstraction, the techniques of propaganda, and the effective forces in advertising. The range of subject matter includes (1) the identification of the devices used by the propagandist and evaluation of their effectiveness; (2) evaluation of news in the mass media; (3) evaluation of advertising in the mass media, including analysis of techniques and identification of appeals; and (4) instruction and practice in the use of persuasion. The guide is arranged by performance objectives with suggested teaching strategies listed under each objective. A listing of student and teacher resources (state-adopted textbooks, non-state-adopted supplementary materials, and films) is provided. (HOD)

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LANGUAGE ARTS
The Language of Persuasion
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DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

DIVISION OF INSTRUCTION • 1971

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THE LANGUAGE OF PERSUASION

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English, Vocabulary

Written by Irvin Groff
for the
DIVISION OF INSTRUCTION
Dade County Public Schools
Miami, Florida
1972

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COURSE NUMBER

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COURSE TITLE: THE LANGUAGE OF PERSUASION

COURSE DESCRIPTION: A study of the speaker or writer as a persuader and identification of the logical and psychological tools of persuasion; an examination of the levels of abstraction, the techniques of propaganda, and the effective forces in advertising.

I. PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

A. The student will discern the basic persuasive elements that influence people to follow certain leaders and adopt certain courses of action.

B. The student will find examples of various types of propaganda in the media, books, and experiences which confront him daily.

C. The student will analyze samples of persuasion, propaganda, and advertising for an understanding of the techniques used and of their impact on the recipient.

D. The student will discriminate between the types of persuasion which affect one in his and/or society's best interest and the types that are designed to serve the special interests of an individual or group.

E. Given a typical goal and a set of techniques, the student will synthesize an effective advertising or propagandistic message.

II. COURSE CONTENT

A. Rationale

The plethora of words which bombard all of us daily is comprised in a large measure of propaganda. In order to think and act effectively and in his own best interest, the student must learn to identify the various types of propaganda. He must know how the persuader works, the techniques he uses, and how the various forces act on the recipient of propaganda and advertising.

In order to be able to comprehend the various types of persuasion, the student must recognize the psychological and logical bases for effective persuasion. When the student has acquired this understanding and ability, he can better protect his own interests, formulate logical conclusions on issues, and act effectively as an individual and as a member of his society.

B. Range of subject matter

1. Identification of the devices used by the propagandist and evaluation of their effectiveness.

   a. Seven common propaganda devices

   b. Misuse of language through such methods as abstractions, slogans, stereotyping, name-calling, loaded words, and euphemisms

   c. Logical and illogical arguments

      (1) Identification of the kinds of reasoning
      (2) Facts versus opinions

2. Evaluation of news in the mass media

   a. Editorials and commentary

   b. Slanted news and bias

   c. Political and social cartoons

3. Evaluation of advertising in the mass media, including analysis of techniques and identification of appeals

4. Instruction and practice in the use of persuasion

III. TEACHING STRATEGIES

A. The student will discern the basic persuasive elements that influence people to follow certain leaders and adopt certain courses of action.

1. Have students list charismatic leaders, present and past, and try to analyze their attractiveness. Encourage students to include leaders whom they reject as well as their heroes.

   a. John F. Kennedy
   b. Fidel Castro
   c. Joe Namath
   d. Moishe Dayan
   e. Che Guevera
   f. Angela Davis
   g. Bernadette Devlin
   h. Janis Joplin
   i. James Dean
   j. Adolph Hitler
   k. George Wallace
   l. Malcolm X
   m. Arthur Godfrey

2. Have students brainstorm ideas, fashions, and people currently "in." Have them determine why these current fads are being followed. Are last year's fads passé? When does an "in" phrase become a cliché?

3. Have students listen to their favorite radio station for one week and keep a record to determine what song is being promoted. What evidence can they offer to substantiate this assumption?

4. Have students turn the tables on the disc jockeys. Have them place many calls requesting a particular selection (preferably one both unknown and mediocre) to determine whether they can create a hit.

5. Help students identify themselves as the target of an immense advertising campaign.

   a. Ads on rock stations
   b. Youth appeal on TV commercials
   c. The promotion of brand name clothes
   d. Appeals for other services such as charge accounts, credit cards, and telephone service.

6. Have students analyze what effective persuasive techniques are employed by such groups as Alcoholics Anonymous, the Seed, Weight Watchers.

7. Assign students to view television programs during specific time slots in order to determine the target audiences for advertisers. Later have the class predict who is listening to TV at given times of day. Have them check out their predictions by polling family and friends and making a telephone survey.

8. Have interested students do research on the necessity for the federal laws against the use of subliminal illumination.

9. Have students examine the techniques used to persuade people to do things about which they may be apathetic or resistant. The following situations might be used:

   a. Registering for social security identification at early age

   b. Not spindling, folding, or mutilating computer data cards

   c. Giving up smoking, drinking, or drugs

   d. Avoiding littering or polluting the environment

   Students might suggest such solutions as catchy slogans or symbols of legislation, community pressure.

10. Have students consider what parts of their lives are governed by their "internal clocks" and what parts are conditioned by "habit circuits." For instance, they might consider the following:

    a. Normally sleeping at night rather than in the daytime

    b. Beauty rituals

    c. Study habits

d. Work and recreation patterns (e.g., Monday, washday)

e. Charitable contributions (tithing, telethons, door-to-door or telephone solicitations, pay-check deductions for United Fund.)

11. Have a group of students research from primary or secondary sources the various degrees of "brain-washing" and share their findings with the class in a symposium. The speakers should report as many specific instances as possible.

a. Personal experiences
b. Books, films
c. News accounts
d. Being influenced by such forces as astrology, philosophic tenets, political doctrines
e. Mind altering substances

12. Discuss with students the four basic kinds of reasoning:

a. Inductive
b. Deductive
c. Cause and effect
d. Analogy

Have them find and report to the class commercials or advertisements which employ each type.

13. Present syllogisms to class and analyze the soundness of each.

a. All men are mortal.
Socrates is a man.
Therefore, Socrates is a mortal.

b. Sagittarius is the sign of a November birthdate
John is a Sagittarius.
Therefore, John was born in November.
(False - John was born in December.)

c. Thoroughbreds are used in dog races.
Speedy is a thoroughbred.
Therefore, Speedy is a racing dog.
(False - Speedy is a race horse.)

14. Have students analyze ads to detect syllogisms from which the major premise is missing. For example, ads which feature men dressed as doctors, talking about medical matters, but never stating "These men are doctors."

15. Ask class to identify the fallacy in this example: You slip on the stairs and sprain your ankle. Looking back on events preceding the accident, you recall that you walked under a ladder earlier in the day.

16. Explain to students how the persuader uses abstractions to mislead and persuade his audience. This can begin with a discussion of who "they" are --- the "they" in any political discussion, demagogic speech or rabble rouser's tirade. Point out the various levels of abstraction that apply to people as people, as voters, as individuals, as members of society, etc. Students will learn much by constructing abstraction ladders leading from specifics to the most abstract, such as: you, man, male, human being, mammal, etc.

17. Have students listen to a recorded or well-prepared reading of Mark Antony's funeral oration for Julius Caesar.

    a. Have them analyze the effectiveness of this speech.

    b. Distribute copies of the oration and guide students in discovering the various persuasion techniques employed.

    c. Pose the question: Could Brutus have read and approved an advanced copy?

18. Have students analyze the following speech by Nikolai Lenin in Moscow, 1920, to determine what types of reasoning are used and where the fallacies lie.

> "Why should freedom of speech and freedom of the press be allowed? Why should a government which is doing what it believes to be right allow itself to be criticized? It would not allow opposition by lethal weapons. Ideas are much more fatal than guns. Why should any man be allowed to buy a printing press and disseminate pernicious opinions calculated to embarass the government?"

B. The student will find examples of various types of propaganda in the media, books and experiences which confront him daily.

1. List on the board and differentiate between the seven common devices of propaganda. Discuss each.

   a. The testimonial: endorsement by a famous or knowledgeable person who says the idea, program, person or product is good or bad according to the persuader's purpose.

   b. The Bandwagon: an appeal to crowd psychology. "Join the group." "Don't be left out."

   c. Generalizing: sweeping judgment is made on the basis of a few facts. This also includes the use of words which sound good but mean nothing.

   d. Repetition: most any statement, if repeated often enough, becomes accepted as truth.

   e. The Straw Man: the opponent's argument is stated incompletely or incorrectly and then easily disposed of (as if it were made of straw.)

   f. Begging the Question: ignoring the real issue; statement of a position as truth without proof or supporting evidence.

   g. Cause and Effect: an event or action that was not necessarily the cause of one that followed it is given credit or blame for causing the second event or condition. Thus a false conclusion is reached.

2. Have students describe in their own words the following:

   a. Definition of a truth

   b. Five statements that he believes to be true

   c. A statement that is totally false

   d. Why it takes so long for a scientific truth to become common knowledge

   e. Where we get our opinions

3. Using examples, relate the following terms to the students and have them compare and contrast their meanings:

   a. Coloration or shading
   b. Antagonism
   c. Distortion or twisting
   d. Favoritism

4. Have students bring in definitions of facts, opinions, and inferences. Discuss and clarify the distinctions being made.

5. Construct a number of statements which represent facts, inferences, and opinions. Ask students to classify the statements.

6. Present articles from different news media for class analysis to see if propaganda devices can be recognized. Discuss the various interpretations possible for the same set of facts. For example, compare the language in a police or coroner's report, the legal indictment, and a newspaper account of the same incident.

7. Conduct a panel discussion on a controversial subject and instruct the class to take note of propaganda used by panel members. Discuss and analyze this.

8. Explain who is generally accepted as an authority on a particular subject and how an authority's reputation affects his reliability. Define bias and explain how to recognize bias by using examples.

9. Call students' attention to what is said and what is left unsaid in a current news story. Tell students of any facts that are lacking. Point out that <u>missing</u> facts can influence public opinion.

10. Explain three ways in which half-truths are used by newspapers:
    (1) They print only one side of an argument.
    (2) They print letters to the editor which agree with the editorial point of view.
    (3) They give prominent attention to news that may further persuade readers to agree with the newspaper's political leanings or its view of some particular issue.

11. Explain that euphemisms are sometimes used to camouflage facts or intentions. Use examples in the area of water pollution such as:

    --"waste water" for sewage
    --"receiving water" for dumping ground
    --"engaging in flow augmentation" instead of diluting sewage
    --"assimilative capacity" for how much waste can be dumped into a river before it shows

12. Ask why the U.S. had a Secretary of War until World War II and then changed the title to Secretary of Defense. Have students offer other examples.

13. Have students find examples of half-truths in newspaper or magazine articles and advertisements.

14. Have students gather editorials from newspapers or find other articles from different news media for class analysis of the propaganda devices used.

15. Have small groups of students construct several statements each of fact, opinion, and inference and let the class determine which is which.

16. In a panel discussion have students examine various slogans and shibboleths used in political campaigns and in advertisements. Have them discuss critically how these slogans are effective in influencing thinking and action.

17. Ask each student to select a controversial social problem and prepare for class delivery a talk which includes facts, opinions, and inferences. The class will discuss each speech critically and discriminate between facts, opinions, and inferences.

C. The student will analyze samples of persuasion, propaganda, and advertising for an understanding of the techniques used and of their impact on the recipient.

1. Explain at least three ways (epithets, slogans, and loaded words) in which propagandists misuse language.

2. Have students investigate the origin of the term "scapegoat" and discuss its modern meaning.

3. Ask students to interpret the effect a scapegoater may have on us when we are merely witnessing his namecalling of others or his references to their race, religion, or nationality in unpleasant or unjustifiable terms.

4. Have students describe the way in which rumors begin and spread and how they change in content. They may wish to play a game like gossip.

5. Describe for the class the six weapons of the scapegoater, explain how they are used, and give examples of each. Briefly explain three possible types of personalities that are likely to become scapegoaters.

6. Make a list of name-calling terms which label people automatically. Test student reaction to these terms as positive, negative, indifferent. Be sure to include some student terms (top teen, head, hood, All-American boy, not-rodder, square, hip, fuzz, etc.)

7. Contrast a blatant example of the use of propaganda in advertising with a subtle example, and discuss the impact and effectiveness of each; e.g., deodorant ads vs. ads sponsored by The American Cancer Society.

8. Have students make a list of the epithets, both approbative and derogatory, seen or heard in the mass media for:

   a. Republican and Democratic Parties

   b. President of the United States

   c. Governor of Florida

   d. Mayor of the city

   e. Labor Union leaders

   f. A celebrity in sports or films

   Cite evidence for the following:

   a. Which epithet is most convincing

b. Whether the negative epithets are accompanied by a statement supporting the accusation or attempting to support it

c. Whether or not the accusation appears justifiable, based on the known or given facts

d. Whether or not the accusation is justifiable, based on the beliefs held by the student

e. Whether or not the epithets would be convincing to the general public

f. How each epithet affects the student's opinion of the person named

9. Have students evaluate an editorial according to the following criteria:

a. Does the writer appear authoritative about the subject?

b. How clear is the style?

c. How sound is the reasoning?

d. Is the editorial persuasive? If not, is it informative, critical, or interpretive?

e. In what way is it persuasive, etc.?

f. Does the editorial avoid wordiness and sermonizing?

g. How effective is the editorial in espousing one idea or cause?

h. Does the editorial reach a logical conclusion?

i. Does the editorial maintain an objective tone or an opinionated one?

10. Have students dramatize examples of "ballyhoo" or the salesman's pitch.

11. Have students report on the effectiveness of some of our propaganda weapons such as:

a. Radio Free Europe

b. The Voice of America

c. Radio Liberty

d. Various aspects of the USIA program

12. Have students investigate and report on the role propaganda played in:

a. The Spanish-American War

b. Nazi Germany and World War II

c. The American Revolution

d. Vietnam War

13. The teacher can select Thomas Paine's The Crisis or Henry's Speech in the Virginia Convention as classic examples of persuasion to be analyzed in class study. Other selections may be contemporary examples of persuasion---almost any social or political essay from any literature text may be used. This analysis can also include documentary type films such as Riefenstahl's "The Triumph of the Will."

The analysis might proceed along these lines: What idea or course of action is the author trying to propagate? How? What devices or techniques are being employed? For example, have students look for connotative words, euphemisms, any fallacy in reasoning such as hasty generalization, false syllogism, argument of the beard, false analogy, black and white fallacy, or any of the classic propaganda techniques such as the testimonial, the band wagon, the straw man, generalizing, begging the question, repetition, or erroneous cause and effect relationship.

These analyses and related follow-up activities such as research and essay reports can take from two days to a week or ten days, depending on the material available.

D. The student will discriminate between the types of persuasion which affect one in his and/or society's best interest and the types that are designed to serve the special interests of an individual or group.

1. Have students collect news articles dealing with politics, race problems, or labor disputes. After discussion, have students predict how the way in which the story is reported will affect the outcome.

2. Have students collect ads containing slogans from the various media. Have these ads organized under the headings of the various kinds of appeals made by the slogan, such as the desire to be sophisticated, masculine, feminine, individualistic, etc. Have students discuss and infer the effectiveness of each ad or slogan on the buying public.

3. Have students analyze a collection of ads to determine what type of appeal is being made. Consider the wording, the lesser emphasis on ideas which might be in the background, the reasons for the choice of colors, the type of person shown, etc. From the ads collected, students will individually specify the techniques which appeal to them personally as prospective buyers. They should also specify which techniques were annoying. Have students compare notes and propose reasons for the differences in their conclusions. This might involve a brief analysis of the differences in their personal backgrounds.

4. Have students, working in small groups, with a collection of ads, identify and list effective persuasive ideas and symbols used in advertising, such as:

   Mother, the flag, apple pie, Abe Lincoln, the Christian cross, the school, etc.

   From the ads analyzed, the students should be able to infer which symbols are most effective and why.

5. Have each student report an incident to the class in which he or someone he knows was deceived by propaganda. He should give as many details as possible and the entire class should attempt to identify the persuasive devices that were used.

6. Explain to students the fact that all important and powerful elements of our society recognize the persuasive power of words and are concerned with their public image as this might be reflected by certain connotative words or phrases. One example of this which might lead to fruitful discussion is this headline from a recent UPI news item:

JUSTICE DEPARTMENT BANS WORDS
MAFIA AND COSA NOSTRA

The daily newspaper will furnish other similar examples.

7. Create an awareness in the students of the possibility of the use of "slant" in news stories dealing with politics, race problems, labor disputes, or even entertainment. This will involve an analysis of connotative words, the "straw man" technique, and the use of words and phrases quoted out of context. The following is an example of the latter technique.

An advertisement for a movie called Fruits of Desire might read:

FRUITS OF DESIRE

"...a top-notch show, brilliantly acted and magnificently photographed...a spectacle...."
____Smith, Daily News.

What Smith, the reviewer, really said was, "For about five minutes Fruits of Desire is a top-notch show, brilliantly acted and magnificently photographed. After that it degenerates into a dismal spectacle of Hollywood hokum."

8. Explain the appeals to which advertisers direct their efforts. The most obvious one is sex. The class will readily find examples of advertisements using sex appeal to sell everything from mouthwash to automobiles. Another popular example is the "plain folks" combined with the "testimonial" technique:

"Mrs. Jenny Doekle of Newport, Idaho, says, 'I wouldn't trade my X-Brand soap for two of the other kind.'"

Some other examples commonly seen on TV which readily lend themselves to class discussion and analysis follow:

"The now generation"

"Where the action is"

"Don't be left out. Hurry and get yours now"

"Scientific tests ...show"

E. Given a typical goal and a set of techniques, the student will synthesize an effective advertising or propagandistic message.

1. Have students formulate and write their own opinions pertaining to any five or six topics in the areas of society, politics, consumer products, etc. Have each student then express each opinion first in the form of a generalization, then in a biased form which clearly indicates whether he intends the assertion to apply to all members of the category named or just to one segment only. From this activity students will deduce the reasons that people usually express opinions in the form of generalizations.

2. Have students construct original cartoons dealing with any aspect of society or politics that appeals to them. These can be reproduced on acetates and discussed.

3. Have students working individually or in small groups write and present original skits. The skits can either be seriously designed to persuade, or satirical take-offs on existing ads.

4. Have students write a speech or essay on a social or political topic, using as many of the persuasive techniques that they have learned as possible. The object is to persuade a particular group or type of readers or listeners to accept the student's point of view.

IV. STUDENT RESOURCES

A. State-adopted textbooks

Christ, Henry I. Modern English in Action 12. Lexington: D. C. Heath & Co., 1968.

Gehlmann, John, et. al., eds. Adventures in American Literature. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958.

Loban, Walter, et. al., eds. Adventures in Appreciation. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958.

McCormick, Paul, et. al. Adventures in English Literature. Atlanta: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968.

B. Non-state-adopted supplementary materials

1. Textbooks

Hayakawa, S. I. and Dresser, William. Dimensions of Meaning. The Bobbs-Merrill Series in Composition and Rhetoric. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1970.

Heintz, Ann Christine. Persuasion. The ComEd Series. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970.

Littell, Joseph Fletcher, ed. The Language of Man, Bk. 6. The Language of Man Series. Evanston: McDougal, Littell & Co., 1971.

2. Reference materials

Baer, Louise F. and Haug, Harriet R. Success in Writing, Bk. 4. Menlo Park: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1970.

Pooley, Robert C., et. al. Perspectives. Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1963.

V. TEACHER RESOURCES

A. Textbooks

(See list under student resources above.)

B. Professional books

*Altick, Richard D. Preface to Critical Reading. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1951.

Berelson, Bernard and Janowitz, Morris, eds. Reader in Public Opinion and Communication. New York: The Free Press, 1966.

Casty, Alan. Mass Media and Mass Man. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968.

Chase, Stuart. The Tyranny of Words. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1938.

Clews, John C. Communist Propaganda Techniques. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964.

Deer, Irving and Harriet, eds. Languages of the Mass Media. Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1965.

Gordon, George N., et. al. The Idea Invaders. New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1963.

Hayakawa, S. I. Language in Action. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1941.

Huxley, Aldous. Brave New World Revisited. New York: Harper, 1958.

McLuhan, Marshall. Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964.

Packard, Vance. The Hidden Persuaders. New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1957.

*Note: This book has proved an invaluable guide and resource to this writer over the years. It is recommended that the teacher secure a copy.

Pei, Mario. Language Today. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1967.

Wheelwright, Philip. The Burning Fountain. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954.

C. Films

A Short Vision. 1-00702

Do Words Ever Fool You? 1-01216

How to Judge Facts. 1-00178

Oral Communications: Effective Persuasion. 1-10400

Propaganda Techniques. 1-00308

The following are free films. Addresses and ordering information follow each.

America's Critics Abroad. 1961. 27 min. AFIF 108

Communist Target - Youth. 1962. 35 min. AFIF 116

Communist Weapon of Allure. 1956. 34 min. AFIF 75

The above three are Department of the Air Force films. Give the title and AFIF number when ordering and allow three weeks booking time. Address requests to:

Air Force Film Library Center
8900 S. Broadway
St. Louis, Mo. 63125

Pressure Groups in Action. 20 min.

Borrower pays return postage and should book three weeks in advance. Address requests to:

Public Affairs Education Dept.
Republic Steel Corp.
P. O. Box 6778
Cleveland, Ohio 44101

Radio Free Europe -- Window to the West. 1966.
13 min.

Borrower pays return postage and should book one month in advance. Address requests to:

Free Europe, Inc.
Public Affairs - Films
2 Park Ave.
New York, New York 10016.